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Water Footprint Assessment: Evolvement of a New Research Field

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Description / Abstract

This paper reviews the evolvement of water footprint assessment (WFA) as a new research field over the past fifteen years. The research is rooted in four basic thoughts: (1) there is a global dimension to water management because water-intensive commodities are internationally traded, so we must study virtual water trade and the effects of countries externalizing their water footprint; (2) freshwater renewal rates are limited, so we must study the development of consumption, production and trade patterns in relation to these limitations; (3) supply-chain thinking, previously uncommon in water management, can help to address sustainable water use from the perspective of companies and final consumers; and (4) a comprehensive approach requires the consideration of green in addition to blue water consumption, the traditional focus in water management, and the analysis of water pollution in the same analytical framework as well. The quick emergence of the new field and wide uptake of the water footprint concept in society has generated substantial discussion about what the concept in narrow sense and the research field in broader sense can offer and what not. The paper reflects on the main issues of debate.

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